

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Venerable Bede Church of England Academy

Vision

'We soar to the heights together'

We aim to serve our community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian faith and practice. We encourage an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promote Christian values through the experience we offer all our pupils. We believe that our Christian values spring from the two great commandments, 'Love God and love your neighbour.' We seek to live this out through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Strengths

- There is a strong and tangible sense of positivity and renewal at Venerable Bede Church of England Academy. Driven by the vision, school leaders are building strong relationships that are at the heart of the school community. This means that there is a clear ethos in the school that encourages pupils and adults to flourish.
- The quality of relationships is a notable strength of the school. Staff are caring, valuing pupils and each other. Astute decisions overcome barriers to flourishing, especially for the most vulnerable. As a result people's lives are transformed.
- The school is highly inclusive and cherishes the worth of every single member of the school community. Dedicated staff go above and beyond to support pupils. The wellbeing of staff is valued highly by school and trust leaders. This ensures that pupils and adults are nurtured to be the best they can be.
- Religious education (RE) enables pupils to ponder big questions, develop curiosity and respectfully express personal ideas and beliefs with confidence. Pupils develop a secure understanding of a range of beliefs and worldviews.
- The school's curriculum and extracurricular provision is carefully planned to reflect its vision. It ensures that pupils are well informed and carefully educated about the wider world. This allows them to reach a deep understanding of issues of justice and responsibility.

Development Points

- Build on the variety of experiences for spiritual development already in place, including through collective worship. This is to enhance the opportunities for spiritual flourishing in all aspects of school life.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to broaden their experience of initiating decisions about social action. This is to enable them to take greater personal responsibility as agents of change within their community and beyond.



Inspection Findings

Venerable Bede Church of England Academy has a very clear Christian vision that runs through the school like a golden thread. The vision is faithful to the school's Anglican foundation and serves the whole of its community. The desire that 'we soar to the heights together' is aspirational. It expresses the school's intention that everyone is given the opportunity to flourish. Leaders ensure that policy decisions are rooted in the school's vision. They are single minded in prioritising aspiration, and support pupils and adults to succeed. The values of Northern Lights Learning Trust closely match those of the school. There is generosity in the way the school and the trust work together, with each benefiting and enriching the other.

The school's curriculum has been skillfully crafted to ensure that it reflects the aspiration for all to flourish. Leaders are very knowledgeable about the community they serve. They ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of pupils and prepares them well for the next stage of their lives. The school offers a wide range of subjects and extracurricular experiences. Leaders understand that pupils can soar to the heights in many ways. Strong curriculum planning allows pupils to develop their own spirituality. For example, an impressive art provision deliberately plans topics that are open to a wide interpretation. This means pupils can explore a range of issues in a safe and understanding environment. The result is a variety of deeply spiritual responses from pupils, even the most vulnerable. Subject areas work together to ensure pupils are taught about different moral issues. Pupils, therefore, can evaluate their world from an informed position. For example, texts are chosen by the English department to enable pupils to appreciate the challenges of discrimination. Therefore, pupils deepen their understanding of the lived experience of people arriving in a new country. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are understood as individuals and offered significant levels of care and support. The nurture that vulnerable pupils receive is a particularly impressive part of the provision at the school. The trust assists school leaders in ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of pupils.

Collective worship is at the heart of the work of the school. Well planned resources on a central weekly theme are used and developed throughout the week. Pupils and adults are given the opportunity to pause and reflect during a busy school day. Different adults lead the worship. This means that a range of ideas and worldviews are shared, and the result is a rich reflection of human spiritual experience. However, opportunities for personal spiritual growth are missing. The collective worship sits within the Anglican tradition, but no faith position is expected from participants. People of faith say they find the worship uplifting while those of no faith find it meaningful and thought-provoking.

The culture of Venerable Bede Church of England Academy creates an atmosphere where individuals, with their strengths and needs, are valued. Wellbeing is central to its work. Adults are extremely positive about the ways in which they are cared for. Issues of workload are sensitively considered to ensure no-one is overwhelmed. Professional development is supported, and career aspirations are nurtured. Adults know they are in a safe place when experiencing personal issues and describe working in the school as 'being part of a loving family.' The trust supports adults by providing access to impressive levels of personal and professional care. Pupils understand that they are valued and thrive in an atmosphere where they are well known as individuals. They regard school as a safe place. One pupil responded to community tensions by saying 'the hate out there doesn't come through the doors of the school.' The school provides a proactive and pragmatic response to pupils whose anxiety impacts school attendance. This caring approach enables individuals to succeed at their own pace. Policies relating to the treatment of individuals are compassionate and reflect the Christian values of the school and the trust.

There is an active culture that expects pupils and adults to take responsibility for others. Pupils understand the need for justice and have had significant voice in shaping the school's work on, for example, the anti-bullying policies. There are well-organised systems for pupils to share their concerns and ideas within the school. Pupils



have opportunities to develop their leadership skills as prefects and members of the trust's parliament. These pupils are impressive role models for their peers. The school provides opportunities for pupils to support their local community and tackle injustices and inequalities through donating to a local food bank and toy collection. Wider experiences have been reduced during COVID years. Opportunities to be agents of change in a broader context are limited.

The RE curriculum at the school is very effective. RE has a high priority within the school and is regarded by leaders as a core subject. The curriculum is well resourced. The school ensures that the team of teachers are all subject specialists and experienced practitioners. The department is overseen by a knowledgeable and skilled subject leader. All pupils study RE at GCSE. School leaders have chosen a specification which they believe prepares their pupils effectively for life after school. This specification challenges pupils to consider different beliefs and opinions. The school makes curriculum decisions based on the needs of the pupils and their deep knowledge of Venerable Bede community.

As a result of the well-structured and well-taught RE curriculum pupils are making good progress. Strong assessment routines mean that teachers are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of their pupils. They can then plan accordingly. An effective team ethos pervades the RE department. This means that ideas and resources are generously shared. This benefits all, as it ensures that all classes receive high quality teaching. The content of lessons is thought-provoking and well sequenced, meaning pupils learn effectively. The curriculum at GCSE is challenging and chosen to extend the understanding and empathy of pupils. It gives them the opportunity to encounter a diversity of religious experience and evaluate different points of view. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 prepares pupils well for their GCSE studies, as they consider a range of different religions and worldviews. Pupils coming into the school in Year 7 have a wide range of experience of learning RE. Effective planning ensures that no-one is left behind and pupils make rapid progress in their learning.

Information

Address	Tunstall Bank, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 0SX		
Date	07 and 08 October 2024	URN	139184
Type of school	Academy	No. of pupils	849
Diocese	Durham		
MAT/Federation	Northern Lights Learning Trust		
Headteacher	Tracey Burgess		
Chair of Governors	Mark Thompson		
Inspector	Gill Jackson		